

*Leigh Viola Lukawiecki:*

# A Countess in Leisure World

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LAGUNA HILLS — Leisure World has nobility within its walls in the person of Countess Leigh Viola Lukawiecki.

While she's a lady with a foreign title, she's as American as the state of Virginia where she was born.

How Yankee she is may be seen in the number of years she served this country in the military and later the diplomatic service.

After traveling around the world with the U.S. Navy (first as an ensign, and later as a senior lieutenant) aboard a destroyer during and after World War II, she returned to California. Having been a San Diego State University graduate she felt Southern California was the ideal region in which to settle down.

## TWO TRIPS

But those faraway places with the strange sounding names kept haun-

ting her. So she made, not one, but two more trips around the globe as a civilian.

It was on her second visit to Vienna she met a pair of old friends. They had a blind date for her. Why not?

As they danced the Vienna waltz in a lavish, romantically-lighted Vienna castle, Count Eugene A. De Lukavice Lukawiecki proposed to Leigh Walbridge.

"I accepted immediately," she glistens.

However, there were complications. The Count, a direct descendant of the Polish King Wisniowiecki who ruled in the 16th century, was being kept under close surveillance by the Russian army of occupation.

He had been a lieutenant on the Russian front in World War I. In the war that followed between Poland and Russia he was a cavalry captain.

Between world wars he was a mo-

tion picture producer in Austria. When Hitler attacked Poland in 1939, Lukawiecki went back to fight for his native country.

## DEATH SENTENCE

That was just an 18-day affair. So he returned to Vienna. He then found himself constantly under the eye of the Nazi Gestapo. In 1942 he was thrown into the Auschwitz concentration camp where he remained three years. He was sentenced to death when a Polish officer escaped.

He was taken out naked with a group one day to be shot. After he counted 25 volleys he heard the order which meant, "That's enough for today. It's getting late." Next day he was moved to another stalag.

Lukawiecki was liberated by the conquering American army, but he was still in a zone controlled by Russia. Now the Russians kept him under careful scrutiny. It was during that period he met Leigh.

How she was able to get him to the United States reads like a TV chapter of "Mission Impossible." It took four years.

Leigh obtained a job with the American embassy in Vienna. They were secretly married, she recalls with a broad smile, "in a pink marble castle." She feared the embassy would transfer her back to the states if her marriage was known.

Then she was transferred - to G2, the intelligence department, still in Austria. That led to further complications.

## SPY MISSION

Now the Russians wanted to use him to spy on her. It was becoming impossible although Leigh refers to her life with the count as "like a Cinderella dream."

That was no golden carriage that one day swooped down and landed in the center of a Vienna street. It was an American plane. The count was kidnaped right off the curb and

dropped in Salzburg, which was in the American zone. She followed in disguise by rail.

They had a great life for a few years, she said, living in Long Beach, California, but on a Christmas day he died of a heart attack. An attack she believes was brought on by the brutality in the German and Russian camps.

Leigh later moved to Palm Springs and came to Leisure World two years ago.

Besides the title Countess, she no longer uses, she is also The Reverend Viola Leigh Lukawiecki. She is an ordained Unity minister and the founder of the Unity-in-the-Desert Church in Palm Springs where she served for ten years. Her name is also to be found in Who's Who Among American Women.

She still lectures, and she does extensive writing. She also finds time to serve as a reporter for Leisure World TV Channel 6.



LEIGH LUKAWIECKI  
... LW Countess

## LWer's own fairy tale: a Viennese romance

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As the years went by, it became too dangerous for the Count to remain in Vienna. His escape was planned by a friend, Colonel Phillip Jones of the army. And here the fairy tale becomes an adventure story.

## Escape

Colonel Jones called Leigh one day to tell her to visit the Count.

"I was to tell him to be at a certain outdoor cafe," she said, "with just

a razor, no clothes packed. There he would be met by a blue Chevrolet." Later Colonel Jones called and said, "I want you to be at that cafe, too."

Leigh walked to the cafe the next day and waited at an outdoor table. "I could just feel all the eyes looking at me," she said. "I've never been so fearful in all my life."

After almost two hours, nothing had happened. "I figured he'd either

gotten away or been picked up by the Russians," she said. Leaving the cafe, she walked to her office. But as she neared the door, a blue Chevrolet pulled beside her, with Colonel Jones driving.

Apparently considering the Chevrolet too dangerous for the Count, the Army had landed a plane on the streets of Vienna to fly the Count to safety.

Leigh was taken from Vienna under military

guard, and the couple was re-united in Salzburg where they were married in the Mirabell Palace. Colonel Jones was the best man, and Leigh Walbridge of San Diego became Countess Leigh Lukawiecki.

## Ever After

The Count presented his bride with a nine-point coronet in rhinestones, a replica of the gold and diamond crown he had left in Poland. After a short stay in Austria, the couple flew to

America and settled in Long Beach to live a more peaceful life.

The Count and Leigh lived happily in Long Beach.

Count Lukawiecki even won \$32,000 on the television show, \$64,000 Question by successfully answering questions about his specialty, automobile racing.

But the fairy tale was not to last forever, and the Count died of a heart attack in 1958.

The next month, Leigh moved to Palm Springs. Having studied the Unity religion for several years, she became a minister of her own church, the Unity-in-the-Desert Church. She served there for 10 years and finally moved to Leisure World in 1972.

The Countess has written many articles for national magazines, the minister still lectures occasionally, and Leigh serves as a reporter for Channel 6.